Rheumatologists to Define 'Absence of Disease'

BY MARY ELLEN SCHNEIDER

NEW YORK — Building on the work in developing a clinical definition of remission in rheumatoid arthritis, a group of clinicians and researchers is interested in creating a complementary patient term called "absence of disease."

Rheumatologists from around the world will begin discussing how to develop this patient-centered definition in Malaysian Borneo in May at the next meeting of OMERACT (Outcome Measures in Rheumatology), an international network aimed at improving outcomes assessment in rheumatology.

It's important to ask patients for their view of the "absence of disease" because they see "remission" so differently from physicians, Dr. Maarten Boers, a member of the OMERACT executive committee, said at a rheumatology course sponsored by New York University. The current remission term is a classic physician-centric definition that is largely based on inflammation, he said.

"If you talk to patients, they talk about totally different things than we talk about in terms of disease," Dr. Boers, a professor at VU University Medical Center in Amsterdam, said in an interview.

Although patients were involved in developing the remission definition by OMERACT, that dimension wasn't fully studied. This time around, the organization plans to spend about 2 years performing qualitative work.

The effort won't have to start from scratch, though, Dr. Boers said, because there has already been qualitative work done on a related issue: the impact of disease, which could be interpreted as the opposite of the "absence of disease" concept. ■